

Safe Street

by Jazz

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Summary: Willow's has a secret wish, one that leads her down another path in life

## 1. Her Fondest Wish

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Willow stared at the night sky, watching the stars twinkle brightly as she sipped Kool-Aid from a large wineglass. Cherry Kool-Aid, the color of fresh blood— Just another of her little quirks. Like the quirk which had led her to sit on her balcony past midnight on a school night. Not that this was unusual; she sat here in this chair at least twice a week, and more when things were going badly. She sighed, emptied her glass, and headed indoors.

She had survived another day.

She turned off the lights and slipped into bed. She had school tomorrow. Not that she particularly cared about the school part; she easily got through her classes with high marks. Practically no thought required. No, the 'friends' part was the part she needed to keep her eye on. Otherwise her mask could slip. And she couldn't allow that mask to slip. If it did, they might learn her secret. A secret only Jessie had known, and he was dead. Her only confidante was dead, and had been for what felt like an eternity, even though it was only a few years. Xander never understood, and then when Buffy came— well, she would never understand. She was too much into the 'Chosen One' mentality for that.

Slowly, sleep crept over her, letting her go into her only sanctuary;

her dreams.

The next morning, she awoke, feeling rested in body. Her spirit, however, was heavy, as it always was. Yet another thing she was used to. She quickly got herself assembled for school, and left her house. The house she lived in, for all intents and purposes, alone. Her parents were around for perhaps three weeks during any given year. Maybe a month if she was 'lucky', or one week if she wasn't. Her parents had never cared for her. That was something she'd learned at the tender age of three, when they had left her with a babysitter for five months. And it had only gone downhill from there; by the age of thirteen, she was living completely alone, having been deemed by her parents 'able to take care of herself'.

She arrived at school, and lost herself in her courses. English, Science, Math and others. It didn't matter which course. She let the information roll over and into her. She passed her homework to Buffy and/or Xander as requested, as they rarely did their own work. Why bother? was probably their reason. They had a Willow to do it for them, after all. Time to head for the library to see if she was needed for any research. This was also the time when her mask needed to be at its best. As anyone with a title of Watcher should be, Giles was very observant, and he probably/certainly would be the one to discover her secret. And that just wasn't allowed. So, cheerful smile pasted on her face, she bounced into the library and asked if there was anything that she needed to do. Giles looked up from his book for a moment and gave Willow a small smile, as he told her to go and 'have some fun for a while. Get away from this musty library for a bit.' She nodded, and left for home, stopping first by her locker to take the books she'd need for her homework first.

She arrived in her empty house, and completed her routine. Homework, shower, and supper. By that time, night had fallen, so she called Buffy to see if the slayer needed any company on her patrol tonight. The answering machine picked up so she hung up. Buffy must have already left for the night. Needed tasks completed, she grabbed the printouts she'd made earlier, and a glass of Kool-Aid, and sat out on her balcony. Her bag of slaying supplies went out with her, with a variety of stakes and crosses, and a second glass of Kool-Aid was put on the small table beside her chair. This was one she never touched; it was made with holy water. Toss the contents on a vamp, and watch them burn. She'd only ever been attacked once here on her balcony, and she'd let the vamp escape. None were stupid enough to come after her anymore. She could take care of herself.

Which of course came to the question of why. Why all this? Why the masks, the folly of being out after dark when there was no need, the heaviness of her soul? The answer was both simple and complicated. She wanted to die. It was something that always pulsed at the back of her mind, the need for her to die. So, why was she still alive? Because things are never simple, and Willow Rosenberg was definitely not simple to comprehend. Willow wanted to die, yes. However, just as Buffy had her duty to slay vampires in her position as Slayer, Willow had the duty of being a Slayerette, of helping the Slayer to slay said vampires. And she couldn't do that if she was dead. So she lived. She lived when all she wanted to do was die, but her honor said that until the danger was past, she wasn't allowed to do as she wished. She wasn't allowed to die.

But she did allow herself to take risks that could result in her

dying. Dying in the line of duty was fine, as long as she gave it her best. And so far, none had bested her. The few times she hadn't been able to slay a vampire on her own, the Slayer or Angel had bailed her out. And her balcony—well, with all the protection spells around it, there wasn't much danger anymore. Only a very strong vampire, such as Angelus or Spike, could penetrate it, and even they would be weak after they did. So, all things considered, she was almost as safe on her balcony as she was inside.

She wondered if Angel knew her secret. Every once in a while, when he thought she wasn't looking, she caught the glances he sent her way. Glances that were somewhere between pity and understanding. As if he knew what she was feeling, as if he'd felt those same feelings himself. For different reasons, perhaps, but the feelings were pretty similar. As time went by, and she got to know him better, the looks changed. He tried to be there for her, as much as he could. After the time he'd come to her house to ask after Ford, he'd returned quite a few times. The first time, when her mother had been home for a day between business trips, they hadn't been able to talk, but they did now. But they never broached any issues that dealt with death. Instead, they talked of life, and she'd felt lighter for a while. That is, until Angel lost his soul, and thus causing her to lose the only friend she could truly talk to. Once again, she retreated into her shell.

Willow absentmindedly sipped her Kool-Aid, her mind light-years away. She was completely unaware of the eyes on her from across the streets. Eyes that had been watching her for a long time now. Eyes that gleamed with gold every once in a while. She finished her drink, and packed her stuff away for another night. Time had slipped by her while her mind was wandering, and it was time for her daily cycle to end, so it could start again tomorrow.

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